



People in housing need

December 2021

Understanding the scale and types of housing need across the country is essential for planning effective policy responses and informing the debate around the need for new homes. Our People in housing need work does just that.

Read our summary to find out more about the types of housing issues facing people across the country, and why social housing can help solve many of these – and read the full research at the link below.

www.housing.org.uk/housingneed

**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

What did we find out?

8.5 million

people in England have **some form of unmet housing need**.

For **4.2 million**

of these people (around 1.6 million households), **social rented housing would be the most appropriate tenure to address that need**.

This is around

half a million

more families than the 1.1 million households recorded **on official waiting lists**.

Two million children in England (1 in every 5) are living in **overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes**.

1.3 million of these children are **in need of social housing**, as this is the only suitable and affordable type of home for their families.

Overcrowding is the largest problem nationally, affecting nearly **3.7 million** people.

Long-term investment in social housing would provide people with suitable homes they can afford, and support the government's commitment to level up disadvantaged communities across the country.

The need for social housing

Our figures show that, for a substantial number of people in housing need, a socially rented home is the only kind of home that could solve this problem in an affordable way.

We found that this would be the case for 1.6 million households – significantly more than the 1.1 million currently recorded on local housing registers.

Our research also revealed that 293,000 children are living in homes that are unsuitable for their needs or health requirements, while 283,000 are living with their families in other people's homes – effectively homeless – as they cannot afford a home of their own.

Government figures show that there are 124,000 homeless children living in temporary accommodation – an 81% rise over the last 10 years.

This creates a compelling case for new social housing – and housing associations are ideally placed to work with the government to build the new social homes needed to address the issues we've identified.





Why do we need this work?

Local housing waiting lists are often used to estimate housing need. However, these aren't always accurate – especially now that applicants must prove a 'local connection', which can prevent many from joining in the first place.

We've worked with Heriot Watt University to assess the true scale of housing need, revealing that over half a million more families are affected than the official figures show.

Please note that the data we used for our research was collected before the coronavirus pandemic, and while we expect the impacts of the pandemic on the issues we identified to be significant – at least in the short term – it is too early to assess and quantify these using this data source.

Results – key numbers

Our research looked at the following housing issues:

- **Concealed households** – where individuals or family units are living within another household, including adult children who wish to move out.
- **Overcrowding** – where a home is not big enough for the number of people living there.
- **Affordability** – where a home is too expensive for those living in it.
- **Suitability** – how appropriate a home is for the people living in it. For instance, where a family with children is in a home with no outside space, or where a home is not adapted to an older person's needs.
- **External condition** – where a home appears to be in poor condition (this is the condition assessment in the 'Understanding Society' dataset and should not be confused with other more widely used condition measures such as the Decent Homes Standard).

2018/19	Households	People	Children
Overcrowded	793,709	3,698,390	1,103,690
Concealed households	1,943,103	2,575,131	283,459
Affordability problem	536,244	1,669,346	699,935
Unaffordable PRS	347,612	772,555	313,391
Affordability issue total	883,856	2,441,901	1,013,326
Unsuitable family	88,310	303,756	142,329
Unsuitable health/age	236,171	610,158	150,429
Unsuitable total	324,480	913,914	292,758
External condition	217,209	661,988	209,210
Homeless	388,150	641,231	-
Any need	3,606,584	8,503,878	1,957,308
Any need, social rent most appropriate	1,637,150	4,217,053	1,275,818

Source: People in Housing Need report www.housing.org.uk/housingneed

1 Individual categories do not sum to the total as households and people may be in more than one type of need.

2 Analysis of homelessness was sourced separately and does not include estimates of the numbers of children affected.

Regional findings

The data splits into four broad regions of England: London, the south, the Midlands and the north. Using these, it is possible to get a broad picture of how the issues are distributed across the country.

Proportion of households affected, by region	North	Mids	South	London	England
Overcrowded	3.0%	2.7%	2.6%	7.9%	3.4%
Concealed	7.3%	8.5%	8.0%	11.7%	8.3%
Affordability problem	2.8%	2.2%	1.9%	2.4%	2.3%
Unaffordable PRS	1.7%	1.1%	1.7%	0.8%	1.5%
Affordability issue total	4.5%	3.3%	3.7%	3.2%	3.8%
Unsuitable family	0.1%	0.5%	0.2%	1.4%	0.4%
Unsuitable health/age	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%
Unsuitable total	1.1%	1.5%	1.3%	2.4%	1.4%
External condition	0.8%	1.3%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Any need	12.7%	13.0%	13.5%	18.9%	13.8%
Any need, social rent most appropriate	4.9%	4.5%	5.0%	8.9%	5.4%

Source: People in Housing Need report www.housing.org.uk/housingneed

The problems are felt in every part of the country – every region has its share of all of the housing issues we looked at. This further supports the case that investing in social housing would support the government's levelling up ambitions.

People living in London experience these problems to a greater degree than those in other regions across almost all the categories. However, people in the north are worst affected by affordability issues, while private rented sector affordability is most severe in both the north and the south. This will be due to a range of

factors including lower income levels in those regions, and the greater importance of the private rented sector in terms of scale in London – meaning it needs to cater to a wider range of the population.

Poor external conditions are found most extensively in the Midlands, although the spread of frequencies for this category is fairly small. This is based on a purely visual external assessment undertaken by interviewers, rather than a full property inspection carried out to a technical benchmark.

Work with us to build more homes

We are experiencing acute levels of housing need in every part of the country, with 1 in 5 children living in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes. Our research makes clear the urgent need for long-term, sustained investment in social housing.

Last year, the government committed £11.5bn to build 180,000 new affordable homes over the next five years through the Affordable Homes Programme. This is a significant sum and the first commitment to funding for social rent since 2010. But with 1.6 million families in need of social housing, more needs to be done. Investing in new social homes across the country would also make an important contribution to the government's commitment to levelling up disadvantaged communities.

Previous research by Heriot Watt University for Crisis and the National Housing Federation found that we need to build 90,000 social rented homes each year to meet demand.

Housing associations are ready to work with the government to build homes for those in need.

About the National Housing Federation

The National Housing Federation (NHF) is the voice of housing associations in England. With almost 700 housing association members, providing homes for around six million people, we are at the forefront of tackling the nation's housing crisis. Our vision is for a country where everyone can live in a good quality home they can afford. We work with our members to make this vision a reality – delivering ambitious programmes that lead to lasting, positive change.